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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, November, 1894.

PROMISING TENDENCIES IN THE STUDY OF ENGLISH.

THE Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States and Maryland, at their meeting in December 1893, appointed a committee of ten, "to consider the present usage in the matter of entrance examinations in English Language and Literature, in the colleges of the Association, and to present, if deemed wise, a scheme of uniform entrance requirements in English to be offered as suggestion or recommendation to the several colleges of the Association." This Committee of Ten immediately took up the work assigned it. Circulars of inquiry were sent out to the leading colleges and secondary schools of the Eastern and Middle States and Maryland, seeking information as to the status of English studies in the respective institutions and, more especially, as to the matter of Entrance Conditions and Examinations. It was the judicious purpose of this Committee, from the outset, to act in harmony with the suggestions of the National Educational Association as, also, with The Commission of Colleges in New England on Admission Examinations, and with the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools; thus coördinating, as far as possible, all proposals and conclusions on the subjects under discussion.

Accordingly, in May, 1894, The Committee of Ten, in joint session with Committees from the two New England Associations mentioned, met in Philadelphia and adopted a Report for presentation to the three respective associations, with the well-grounded expectation that they would see their way clear to its acceptance. This Report of The Conference of Sixteen is now before us, and awaits endorsement and application. Among the General Recommendations of the Conference are the following:—

"1. That the books prescribed be divided into two groups—one for reading; the other for more careful study.

2. That in connection with the reading and study of the required books, parallel or subsidiary reading be encouraged.

3. That a considerable amount of English Poetry be committed to memory in preparatory study."

As to the specific Entrance Requirements, the Conference recommends, in part, the following:—

"1. *Reading*.—A certain number of books will be set for reading. The candidate will be required to present evidence of a general knowledge of the subject matter, and to answer simple questions on the lives of the authors."

For 1895, the authors prescribed are:—

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: The *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*, in *The Spectator*: Irving's *Sketch Book*: Scott's *Abbot*, etc.

"2. *Study and Practice*. This part of the examination presupposes the thorough study of each of the works named. The examination will be upon subject-matter, form and structure."

For 1895, are prescribed:—Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Macaulay's *Essay on Addison*, etc.

For colleges desiring an Advanced Examination in English as such examinations are held in other departments, the Conference recommends either of the following courses:

1. A detailed study of a single period of English Literature, such as that of Queen Anne.

2. Old English Prose and parts of Chaucer.

It need scarcely be said, that this Advanced Examination has reference to future rather than existing needs.

In the light of these statements and requisitions it will be seen, that the Report as submitted practically eliminates some of the existing subjects in English entrance, as Geography, English Grammar and the correction of faulty English, and substitutes therefor the reading and study of English authors, while emphasizing and enlarging the whole subject of English Prose Composition, as already required in a measure in many institutions.

The changes proposed are, thus, radical and comprehensive; a formation or construction of a course rather than a reconstruction; an organization, out and out, of Entrance English on a new and broader basis, with a new method and purpose, and affecting, directly and indirectly, all the varied sections of English work preparatory, collegiate and graduate.

The scheme, in its essentials, impresses us as an admirable one, and one, we may modestly add, towards which the adjustment of Academic English in Princeton has been steadily tending, and which, indeed, in our recent June Examinations, was substantially realized. Great praise is due the members of the various associations and committees who have spent no little time and labour in gathering material, simplifying complexities, and reaching so satisfactory a result.

Modifications and possible improvements might, of course, be suggested; to the effect, perchance, that the scheme applies, in the main, to Academic English, and that the growing needs of our Schools of Science have not been sufficiently studied; that more emphasis should be laid upon a knowledge of the elements of the English Language, its history and structure, and of the simpler principles of English Composition; that an outline sketch of English literary history might be desirable; that the number of authors assigned, in the respective years, is too large to insure thoroughness in secondary teaching and abiding results in later educational work, and that some of the books themselves, are, possibly, too far above the mental status of the average American school-boy.

All objections conceded however, the changes are fundamentally wise, and look in the right direction, and are so generously submitted as to allow of any amendment as necessities arise.

Nothing more or less than this could be required of any such scheme, marking as it does so decided an improvement upon the present conditions of Preparatory English in America. Our readers need not be told what these conditions are and have been, in their failure to allow anything like a reasonable demand.

On the part of most of our secondary schools there has, indeed, been no such thing as a consistent and systematic preparation in English, and mainly for the reason that most of the colleges of the country have been practically indifferent to the whole subject. It is one of the signal merits of President Eliot's administration at Harvard that, from its beginning until now, he has kept this matter of English,

preparatory and collegiate, before the attention of American educators, insisting, as he wrote in 1884, upon its "recognition as of equal academic value with any subject now most honored."

No man among us has done more than he to emphasize its needs and show how to meet them; no one has been more efficient than he in these pending movements towards a higher state of things, while Harvard University, with its existing elaborate English courses, and its special attention to the art of English Composition, is approximately realizing these high ideals.

It is in the secondary schools, however, that the initial and important work is to be done, and it is here that President Eliot has expended his efficient energy, in the line of organization and impulse. The condition of things which was found in most of these schools, even in New England, was lamentable indeed;—apologies for the study of English instead of the study itself; a rapid and superficial survey of English Grammar, if, indeed, any; an utterly methodless attempt to compass some results in English Prose Composition; a practical concession, in the presence of the student, that English was a subject that could be safely left to itself and to the caprices of the hour, and that any such result as a thorough knowledge of the vernacular and the cultivation of literary taste belonged, of right, to the closing years of a college course. In a word, the department, as a whole, has been kept subordinate to every other competing branch of liberal study, until, by the sheer force of a reactionary movement, the question for the proper place of English, in the school and the college, has come to be one of the pressing questions of the hour. Students and teachers alike are now calling for a more consistent and logical adjustment of English; for its rightful coördination with related studies in the academy and the university; for a full appreciation of its value as a mental discipline, and as absolutely essential to the historic development of English Literature in America.

The Report of the Conference, as now submitted, goes very far towards meeting these needs and opens the way for still more satisfactory results in the developing needs of educational work.

Some of the Benefits contemplated in the Report and secured by it may be noted. First of all, is the Unification of English in the Secondary Schools, so that teachers and pupils alike may know where they stand and at what they are aiming. As the Report states, "The preparatory schools desire the limits of the English Examination clearly defined." Hitherto, as is well known, everything has been indefinite. A few of the New England schools apart, there has been no uniformity of instruction, method and purpose. Each master has taken his own way as to what to teach and how to teach it; the colleges have been equally vague and varied in the subject-matter of their requirements; teachers have been more than puzzled in the attempt to prepare their pupils for entrance to different colleges with such different requisitions, and the result has been that entering students have come up to the college examination scarcely knowing what was expected of them, while the examination has too often been nothing short of an academic travesty. To pass it, conferred no particular honor upon the applicant, and to fail to pass it, imposed no particular disgrace. All this is now rectified by the scheme before us, "a scheme," as we are told, "of uniform entrance requirements" and, as is added, "a useful one for an association which has in its membership colleges, scientific schools and institutions somewhat diverse in character."

Nor is it meant that such uniformity shall be in any sense so rigid and mechanical as to preclude the exercise of freedom on the part of the school and the college. There is unity rather than uniformity; enough similarity to ensure the general consistency of plan and result and, yet, enough diversity to admit of personal preference and method.

As in the Advanced Examination there are two distinct courses open to choice, so in the regular examination, either the requirements as to Reading, or those as to Study and Practice, may be accepted as the entire requirement, while teachers may feel at liberty to limit the number of authors specified, as we have done and shall do at Princeton.

One of the best results of this unification of studies is seen in the fact that it vitally connects, as has never been done before, the English

educational work of the school and the college; places them as institutions on a line of logical sequence; utilizes thus the most economic efficiency of each and, more than all, brings them, as never before, into educational affinity and sympathy. Hitherto, there has been no mental harmony in English work, as there has been in classical and other studies, between these two orders of institutions, and the results have been most injurious. The very constitution of the Conference of Sixteen, with its representatives of colleges and schools in joint session over interests common to all, has been, in itself, a promising feature. Moreover, it is by just such a unification that the specifically English work of the college may be so adjusted and outlined at the beginning as to secure to the student the best possible results, and place the study where it belongs in the general scheme of a liberal curriculum. One year, at least, of time and effort will, at once, be gained. The entire work of the Freshman Year in English, as now conducted, may soon safely be remanded to the secondary school, and the college course be thereby enlarged and enriched. With a class of students entering thoroughly grounded in the elements of English,—grammatical, rhetorical, linguistic and literary,—and with a good degree of actual practice in English Prose expression, their progress along all lines of English work would be ensured from the outset and our American graduates be, as never before, rooted and grounded in the knowledge and use of their vernacular.

A further benefit accruing to this new order of things is seen in the increasing emphasis that is laid upon the *literary* side of English work. It is here that, to our mind, the excellence of the scheme is most apparent.

Whatever differences of opinion have existed among the various associations in conference there has been substantial unanimity here:—that the students of our schools should be made acquainted with the best English and American Literature; with the masterpieces in prose and verse, and so selected and studied as to give to the student something like an historically connected view of the growth of Modern English Letters. Some of these books are to be read in a general way for general literary re-

sults, while others, as Bacon would say, are to be "chewed and digested." In addition to all this, in the line of specific preparation, "parallel or subsidiary reading is to be encouraged," as, also, the committal to memory of "a considerable amount of English poetry."

All this is in the right direction and marks the most decided advance and promising tendency in English work. There is no better way of knowing what literature is than reading it. It is better than the study of language, good as that may be; better than the technical study of rhetorical laws and principles, good as that may be; better than the study of criticism of books. Nothing will atone for the neglect of the actual reading and much reading of the very best books, so as to know them experimentally and vitally; so as to imbibe their spirit and feel at home in their company; and, thereby, cultivate a taste and faculty by which "the best that is known and thought in the world" shall be the best to us. It is this factor and feature that American education is needing as much as it needs anything, if so be our learning is to be allied to culture, and English Literature, this side the sea, is to be worthy of its British antecedents.

As a necessary result of all this, there will follow the deepening and broadening of a genuine English literary spirit in American students. We are not referring here to the pursuit of this or that specific English study; to any specific method of English work, or to the selection of this or that English author or book, but to the inner impulse and spirit of English literature, back of all book and method, and teacher and objective end, so that we shall not only be held loyally true to the best interests of our vernacular and be able to speak the English language correctly and write it clearly, cogently and in good taste, but shall enter by training and habit into a due appreciation of its best literary products and find ourselves in fullest sympathy with every expression of good taste and with all forms of literary progress.

No amount of specifically classical training in our schools, desirable as it is, should be sufficient to lessen this English influence or impair its value. English students (whatever else they may or may not be) should be pre-eminently English in character, tone, spirit

and aspiration, and nothing will more effectually induce this desirable result than the appreciative knowledge, on the part of our American students, of the fulness and richness of English authorship. They are, in Johnsonian phrase, to "spend their days and nights" with these authors.

This Report, therefore, as it lies before us, is far more than a Report on Entrance Examinations in English. It is, in reality, a Report on English studies as a whole, calling attention to urgent needs as now existing and proposing a plan by which they may be met. In English, as elsewhere, when Secondary Instruction is properly adjusted, the higher forms and periods will be rightly adjusted, and all factors and elements coöperate towards the best ultimate result. It is one of the most hopeful signs in Modern Education that this spirit of unity and catholicity is so rapidly growing,—a real and healthful Communism in all intellectual endeavor and research. As in our colleges themselves, the old class distinctions are fast giving way to broader economy, and to the highest good of the general student body as a fraternity of scholars, so are the sharply, dividing lines between the school and the college, the Master and the Professor, fast disappearing by the very force of events and by the growing desire, on the part of all right-minded educators, to coöperate in all worthy scholastic effort, if so be our institutions of learning, higher and lower, may be what they ought to be, the most potent factor, next to the Christian Church, in the cause of truth and right.

THEODORE W. HUNT.

Princeton College.

CORNEILLE FROM 1640 to 1650.

STUDENTS of the French drama of the first half of the seventeenth century find themselves much at a loss regarding its development, owing to the great confusion recently introduced into the chronology. So long as the dates of the *Frères Parfait* remained unquestioned, absolute statements as to authors and works passed without criticism. But with the discoveries of Marty-Laveaux concerning one or two plays of Corneille, the overhauling which more recently befell Mairet's autobiog-